

Central Intelligence Agency



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Korea: The Military Balance

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The major military buildup that North Korea has carried out since the early 1970s has tipped the inter-Korean military balance in P'yongyang's favor (see table). South Korea has begun a series of force modernization programs of its own, but we foresee only limited gains by South Korea until at least the late 1980s.

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North Korea has 1.25 times as many men in the active ground forces as the South, and a 1.5 to 1 numerical lead in major maneuver units.

- It has nearly 2.5 times as many tanks, and a similar advantage in armored personnel carriers.
- The North has many more large tank and mechanized units, and a larger number of high quality tanks.
- North Korea's numerical lead in artillery approaches 2.5 to 1, and many of its weapons are more mobile than those of the South and have a greater firing range.

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The South has more large ships and better antiship missiles than the North, but we believe the South's Navy is still too small to defend against an enemy that has nearly four times as many ships and craft. North Korea has 21 attack submarines, the South has none, and the North has over twice as many missile boats.

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Although North Korea has over 1.5 times as many combat aircraft, the South's high-quality fighters are more than a match for those in the North.

- The South has better air-to-air missiles, its fighters can fly farther and carry heavier ordnance loads, and its pilots are better trained.
- South Korea's air power would be strained, however, to fulfill all of its combat missions, which include providing air defense against a numerically superior enemy as well as supplying major support to ground forces that are outnumbered and outgunned.

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Because of the North's advantages in standing forces, timely warning of a North Korean attack is critical to the South's ability to mount a successful defense.

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Comparison of North and South Korean Forces
(selected units and equipment)

	<u>North Korea</u>	<u>South Korea</u>
Army personnel	700,000	548,000
Divisions and Brigades (Infantry and Armor)	50	28
Medium tanks	3,000	1,265
Armored personnel carriers	1,900	760
Artillery weapons	6,500	2,800
Air Force personnel	56,000	32,000
Fighters *	585	324
Bombers/Attack Aircraft	110	30
Helicopters	120	350
Surface-to-air missiles on launchers	260	414
Antiaircraft guns	11,000	1,950
Naval Personnel	37,000	24,000
Destroyers/frigates	3	19
Attack submarines	21	0
Missile boats	27	11
Patrol/torpedo boats	330	60
Landing ships/craft	125	39

* does not include armed trainers



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